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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study investigated the impact on students of participation in Literacy Volunteers of New York City (LVNYC). Change in three major areas was examined: literacy skills; self-concept, attitudes, and beliefs related to literacy development; and involvement in literacy tasks outside the program. Data were collected through open-ended focus group interviews, individual interviews, and observation. Additional data included student demographic information, standardized test scores, and writing samples. Findings indicated that students associated prior school experiences with failure and were attracted to specific characteristics of LVNYC's program. They enjoyed group instruction. All participants raised the issue of space. Most dropouts left because of some condition unrelated to the program. Reading and writing skill development was viewed as occurring within and outside the program and as private and public practices. Situations in which students used skills outside the program included jobs, banks, public transportation, and grocery stores. Students reported widespread positive changes in self-concept and attitudes. The Student Leadership Program complemented the instructional program. Qualitative analysis indicated that writing samples strongly supported skill development, whereas standardized reading test scores offered weaker support. Changes in the provision and organization of services and ongoing assessment, evaluation, and program development were recommended. (13 references) (YLB)

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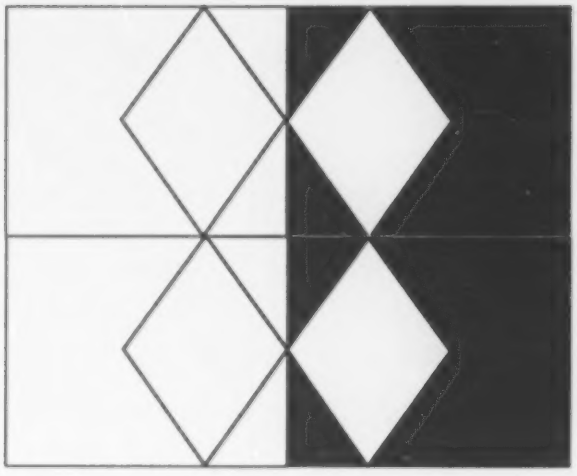

"THEY REALLY PUT A HURTIN' ON MY BRAIN":

LEARNING IN LITERACY VOLUNTEERS OF NEW YORK CITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Literacy South

Durham, N.C.

January, 1991

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LEARNING IN LITERACY VOLUNTEERS OF NEW YORK CITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hanna Arlene Fingeret
Susan Tuck Danin
Literacy South, Durham, N.C.

January, 1991

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

This is a study of a rich, interactive world of adults, their families and friends, and the volunteers and staff who are helping them develop their literacy skills. It provides a window into one aspect of their lives as they struggle, alone and together, with the challenges, joys, and agonies of change. They made a commitment to teach us about their lives and the impact of participating in Literacy Volunteers of New York City, and we made a commitment to listen, to try to learn, and to work together with them to bring their voices to this report.

Most of the fieldwork for this study was conducted over seven months in 1990. The major question addressed in this study is, "What is the impact of participation in Literacy Volunteers of New York City, for students?" We examined change in three major areas: 1) literacy skills; 2) self-concept, attitudes and beliefs related to literacy development; and 3) involvement in literacy tasks outside the program. This study is primarily qualitative, although it includes a quantitative analysis of standardized test scores and writing samples.

We find that Literacy Volunteers of New York City is an effective program that is in the forefront of literacy education in its ability to help students move from a text-based to a knowledge-based approach to reading; its extensive use of writing for instruction and personal reflection; its commitment to student leadership development; and its use of group instruction. Literacy Volunteers of New York City's instructional program is a dynamic response to the needs and interests of adults with very low literacy skills. Students work together in groups with one or two tutors, helping each other learn to read and write as they slowly peel off layers of negative feelings about themselves and their potential.

Literacy

Literacy Volunteers of New York City (LVNYC) is a unique program, reflecting the shared struggles of untold thousands of students, staff and volunteers over its seventeen year history. Nonetheless, it also has characteristics in common with other literacy programs, and with particular schools of thought about literacy. It is important for us to be able to place LVNYC in relation to these practices and theories as we try to understand the meanings of the students' stories that we hear in subsequent chapters. Therefore, we begin with a framework for thinking about literacy and the purposes of literacy programs.

Philosophical thought about literacy and literacy education in the United States is developed within the larger context of American ideals of individualism and independence; this is reflected in American education's commitment to individual differences. This conception of the nature of personhood and the self lies at the heart of our notions of literacy. There are several competing notions of literacy today (this framework is drawn from Lytle and Wolfe, 1989). We are most familiar with what many call the literacy as skills perspective, since it permeates our public schools. Similar to this is a notion of literacy as tasks (Lytle and Wolfe, 1989), in which literacy is viewed as the ability to independently and successfully accomplish specific tasks such as filling in forms, pulling information from newspaper ads, or addressing an envelope.

Literacy also can be understood as social and cultural practices; adults engage in a range of activities for different purposes and in different situations. Practices imply a relationship between the persons, the situation, and the resources available. Finally, there is the perspective of literacy as critical reflection and action in which literacy is seen as a means for adults to challenge the conventional wisdom, the myths and assumptions underlying their beliefs and perceptions, for the purpose of changing their relationship to the social structures.

Literacy programs define their purposes in relation to their definition of literacy. At one end of a continuum are programs that are oriented to individual achievement and social mobility, to helping adults fit into the status quo. Other programs are more community-oriented, working with adults in their communities to develop individual skills as well as to work toward broader social change that requires collective action.

Of course, no program is an "ideal type" of any of these categories and definitions, and each creates a unique tapestry of responses to the characteristics of the situation and the persons involved. But as we examine the impact of participation for students in Literacy Volunteers of New York City, it is important to keep these dimensions in mind. Placing LVNYC in relation to the range of definitions of literacy and purposes of literacy programs will enable us to better understand the relationship between the program's characteristics and its impact on students' skills and lives.

The Program

Instruction is provided in two types of environments at LVNYC; most of the Centers are in corporate office buildings, but one is in a neighborhood church and another in a neighborhood restaurant. Each group we observed organized their time differently, but there were some general patterns: all sessions tend to have some reading (silent or oral) followed by a short discussion, and some writing also followed by discussion; the order varies. Students identify their own learning goals and choose reading materials and write on topics which reflect their interests and goals. Volunteer tutors support learners in their endeavors by leading group discussions, introducing reading and writing skills, helping to locate appropriate reading materials, and monitoring students' progress toward their goals.

Each Center holds "celebrations" of students' reading and writing. During these events, which take place at the Centers, students read and respond to each others' writing. Students are also invited to read their writing at an annual program-wide writing celebration which recognizes and awards outstanding writers from all the Centers. Center newsletters and LVNYC publications provide other avenues of expression for student writing and generate reading material for students.

LVNYC is in the vanguard of adult literacy programs in developing an advocacy program which strives to integrate students into all levels of the organization. The Student Leadership Program was established in 1985 and consists of the Student Committee, which is made up of two elected representatives from each of the nine instructional programs; a student who attends board meetings; and two former students who form the Student Leadership Team in the central office. Students also participate in orienting new students, training volunteers, and media presentations about the program.

SECTION 2. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Methods used to evaluate any program are determined by the stated goals of the program, the purpose of the evaluation, the evaluation questions, and the audience(s) for the evaluation. Literacy Volunteers of New York City identifies itself as committed to student-centered learning which will enhance students' literacy skills as well as have an impact on their self-esteem. Overall, the program hopes to help students create a better quality of life for themselves and their families. Reflecting the program's central concern with students' change, the evaluation of LVNYC sought to answer the main question, "What is the impact for students of their participation in LVNYC?" by examining three major areas: (a) changes in students' literacy skills, (b) changes in attitudes and self-concept related to literacy development, and (c) changes in involvement in literacy tasks outside the program.

This study was concerned with assessing the outcomes of participation, but we wanted to understand the process through which those impacts develop as well. This meant that we had to use research methods that would allow us to immerse ourselves in the students' world so that change could be viewed as a dynamic process rather than simply as a list of behaviors. In addition, evaluation approaches must be consistent with the program's philosophy and approach to instruction. Only then do we have some assurance that we are assessing that which the program is attempting to develop. In the case of LVNYC, this meant that evaluation methods must incorporate flexibility and responsiveness.

Therefore, this evaluation is primarily qualitative. Qualitative methods provide a holistic view and reveal the program in as naturalistic a way as possible. The evaluator discovers the meaning and impact of the program through the perspectives of the participants; analysis is inductive rather than deductive, and is concerned with process as well as outcomes. We used open-ended focus group interviews, individual interviews, and observation as the main data collection methods. Additional data included program documents and students' demographic information, standardized test scores, and writing samples. All evaluation research must meet certain criteria for rigorous and systematic investigation in order to be useful. This study, by design, meets those criteria established by the research community for credible and trustworthy research.

The evaluation project was completed in three phases: (a) planning, (b) data collection, and (c) analysis and final report. We used open-ended focus group interviews, individual interviews, and observation as the main data collection methods. Additional data included students' demographic information, standardized test scores, and writing samples. All program literature was made available to us, including the tutor training manual, student advocate guidelines, past internal and external evaluations, data forms, and minutes of the Student

Committee meetings. We also collected samples of the various newsletters produced by each of the Centers and LVNYC publications.

A total of 102 students (65 in focus groups and 37 by phone) were interviewed. Ten students, selected from the focus groups, were interviewed individually two or three more times, as case studies. Twenty tutors were interviewed (14 as part of the instructional group observations and an additional 6 in a focus group). Sixteen staff members were interviewed (2 student advocates, 1 center assistant, 7 center directors, and 6 central office staff).

Twenty observations were done at the Centers (two for each of the nine instructional groups and two for the additional groups). One observation was done during each of three phases of tutor training for a total of three observations. One observation was done during a pre-enrollment session and one observation was done during an annual program-wide event.

We also collected information that would be analyzed quantitatively, to complement the qualitative body of the study. These data included students' writing samples taken at different points in their participation in the program and students' standardized test scores. The methods and results are discussed in Section Eight.

Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed separately. The findings in each domain were used to inform each other, to assist with interpretation and to contribute to the overall conclusions. We were able to compare, contrast, and triangulate data, because we interviewed persons across all the programs, included all levels of perspectives, (multiple sources), reviewed documents, and did observations (multiple methods). We did an inductive analysis which meant that the categories or codes came from the data itself. Students talked about how they came to the program, what their goals were, and changes they had seen in themselves. The preliminary analysis was presented to three groups of people at

LVNYC for their response and verification. Each group felt the data were presented clearly, accurately, fairly, and were congruent with their experiences.

SECTION 3: "GO FOR IT": SCHOOLING THEN AND NOW

The next five sections present an overview of the qualitative findings from the evaluation. Section Three focuses on prior schooling and entering LVNYC; Section Four examines the instructional program at LVNYC, from the students' perspectives; skill development inside the program is presented in Section Five; impacts on life outside the program are explored in Section Six; and Section Seven looks at the Student Leadership program. The quantitative results are presented in Section Eight, and final conclusions and recommendations are in Section Nine.

Prior schooling experiences

Students' approaches to participation in Literacy Volunteers of New York City are related to a number of factors, not the least of which is their prior experience with schooling. Some of the older adults never really went to school; they were needed at home to watch their siblings or work, and the value of schooling was viewed differently then. Everyone describes their public school time with some pain; they were embarrassed and ashamed, unable to do the work. Teachers were often seen as a problem; while some were helpful, many were unable to respond to students' special needs within large classes. For some students, school was a battleground.

Although the usual commentary on adult literacy students' prior school experiences emphasizes the students' "failure" in the schools, these students' stories are striking examples of ways that schools have failed them. As young children, they felt they had to make choices between social and physical survival and proper school behavior. When they grew older and more secure in their social niches, they already had been classified by the school system and were unable to break out of those categories.

These adults felt a deep sense of powerlessness as children to get the system to respond to their needs. While some sat docilely in the back of the room, others acted out, refusing to take the roles the school was defining for them. Their determination and courage were forged in the halls of public schools and on the streets of their neighborhoods; many bring their critical analysis of power relationships to their participation in Literacy Volunteers of New York City.

Entering LVNYC

Students are attracted to specific characteristics of LVNYC's program; they often have tried other programs before and they were bored or unable to learn from commercial workbooks and large classes. Although there often seems to be a "triggering incident," students' decisions to enter the program are not usually a response to one particular event, but rather part of a larger process of change in their lives.

Making the first telephone call and entering the program was stressful for everyone we talked with; it required great courage, trust, and, sometimes, overcoming obstacles such as finding money for carfare or childcare, negotiating with spouses and maneuvering through unfamiliar subway and bus routes. Their early contacts with the program are crucial to helping students feel that the potential exists for real change through their participation in LVNYC. Most students found that first time reassuring.

Goals

Some students talk concretely about their goals and how developing their literacy skills fits into their plans. Many students with whom we spoke mentioned their commitment to their children as a major source of motivation. Other students cite employment-related reasons for coming to the program; further education is a specific goal for some students.

But most of the students who shared their dreams with us simply want to be able to read and write "like other people do;" they would like to "fit in" without drawing attention to themselves and without feeling uncomfortable. Although it is important for students to identify specific situations in which they would like to use their literacy skills, it is also important that this larger goal of learning to apply literacy skills to a broad range of life situations not be lost. More than anything, the students want to feel that there are possibilities in the future, that there are choices and the potential for change.

SECTION 4: "LET THE PEOPLE LEARN": THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

Groups and tutors

One of the most striking features of Literacy Volunteers of New York City is that all of the instruction takes place in groups. Groups range in size from two or three to six or eight; most groups jell, with lively interaction among group members. Many tutors seem to work well with the group as a group; others essentially do individual work with students in a group setting.

Most students enjoy the group and prefer it over individual tutoring; some would like to have their own tutor. It is clear from students' language that they felt that groups were "done to them" rather than something they initiated or supported; nonetheless, many feel positive now about working in groups. This often reflects an understanding of the social nature of learning and functioning in our society. Some students and tutors would like students to have a choice between one-to-one and group tutoring.

The majority of students who spoke with us create relatively deep, trusting relationships with their tutors and worry about the loss of those relationships. They appreciate that their tutors volunteer their time and they value a combination of

personality characteristics and teaching skills. The students' descriptions of what happens when they lose effective tutors is consistent across all of the students who spoke with us: there is a cost when effective tutors leave and they have to "break in" new tutors. Students feel powerless about their tutors coming and going. Students are not consulted in the assignment of new tutors, and they either wait patiently (when they do not like a tutor) or with dread (when they find a tutor effective) for that tutor to leave. This issue of powerlessness is important not only because LVNYC is concerned about the quality of the relationships created with students, but also because these power relations are part of the larger learning environment.

Instructional practices

Instruction is provided in two types of environments; most of the Centers are in corporate office buildings and a couple are in community settings. Space is an issue raised by tutors, students and Center Directors; everybody has the feeling of "making do."

Each group we observed organized their time differently, but there were some general patterns that reflect tutor training. All sessions tend to have some reading (silent or oral) followed by a short discussion, and some writing also followed by discussion; the order varies. Students often read to the group what they have written, and some tutors will take final versions of pieces home to type for students.

At Literacy Volunteers of New York City, students read real books rather than workbooks to improve their reading skills. One of the controversies in the program during the period of this evaluation had to do with choosing between reading out loud and reading silently during instruction. A concomitant issue is whether everyone should be reading the same book, particularly during silent reading. We observed extensive interaction among students as they read out loud. They assist each other and support each other's efforts.

Students love writing at Literacy Volunteers of New York City. We saw students writing everywhere -- in all of the Centers, with their groups or sitting alone before or after class. Students proudly displayed their notebooks and folders filled with writing and enthusiastically shared the stories behind their stories. Approaches to writing are very consistent across the groups we observed, and emphasize meaning and communication.

Tutors appear to believe that they are not supposed to be teaching specific word attack skills -- particularly phonemic analysis. Yet, they find such skills important to the students and useful, so many tutors teach these skills anyway, feeling torn between responding to students' requests and complying with program policy. Some tutors are frustrated because they would like more training about teaching subskills.

Tutors and students both seem to be developing an orientation to reading as a process of constructing meaning; this appears to be a direct reflection of LVNYC's use of real reading materials rather than workbooks for instruction. Some tutors seem to be able to work with students to develop a mutually comfortable way of providing and receiving assistance; others, however, seem to have interpreted their training to imply more rigid postures.

The issue over silent and oral reading seems to be an example of how participants in the program -- staff, volunteers and students -- dichotomize some situations rather than recognize and work with the inherent tensions. Although staff said they want tutors to use both so that there is some match between reading purpose, materials and approach, that kind of flexibility has not been internalized by the volunteers, with notable exceptions. Specific skills instruction is another area in which there is the widespread perception of a rigid rule: no phonics. This is particularly interesting because the tutor manual clearly talks about how to teach skills -- the importance of working with skills in context -- rather than presenting tutors with a ban on phonics. But there is a prevailing sense of complicity with

students against program policy when teaching subskills that should be explored further.

Leaving the program

Students who stop attending the program are categorized either as drop-outs, meaning that they did not reach their goals, or as graduates, which means that the program staff feels the student is ready to move on to another program. LVNYC offers graduates the opportunity of participating in a Transition Group so that they can work with a staff member and other graduates to move on successfully.

Almost all of the students who dropped out of the program initially responded that they left because of some condition that was unrelated to the program, such as health or transportation. Every one of these adults say they desperately want to learn to read and write but very few of them continued on in another program. Many of the students we spoke with who dropped out of the program left with warm feelings.

The most common reason we heard for students leaving the program for instruction-related reasons was dissatisfaction with the way their tutors approached teaching. This had to do with teaching methods, sensitivity to cultural and racial issues, and general instructional approach. Some students want a program that more closely resembles their images of school.

The transition process is still too new to be able to see patterns over time, but students should be followed to see if they continue to participate in educational programs. Students who have left the program and investigated other programs have difficulty finding programs that are at the appropriate skill levels, responsive to the students' interests, and supportive. It seems logical to re-examine the program's decision to work with students only up to a fifth grade equivalent level. Literacy Volunteers of New York City may be asking students to leave the program at a point when they are particularly vulnerable; they may be in transition to skills that will

enable their continuing independent learning, but those skills may not be solidified yet.

SECTION 5: SKILL DEVELOPMENT INSIDE THE PROGRAM

"Yes, I am learning," was the overwhelming conclusion of the large majority of students with whom we spoke and, as we listened to students' stories, a mosaic of consequences of program participation emerged. Actual changes in skills is only the foundation that supports numerous impacts on life inside and outside the program.

As we talked with students about their participation in LVNYC and what impact it has had on their lives, we were confronted with an impressive array of narratives of change and limits to change. As we worked with students and program staff to make sense out of all of these stories, to find the patterns in the weave, we came to an even deeper understanding of literacy as social practices. It became clear through students' experiences that impact is situational. In order to understand the impact of participation, therefore, we must look at students' lives and try to understand the relationship between the person, the social situation, and literacy. We have to understand that literacy is not only in situations, but literacy change has an impact on the situation, as well.

The two broad categories of situations in which students develop and use their literacy skills are inside and outside the program. Inside the program students know that information about their literacy skills is known and that the status of their skills is shared by many other persons. Inside the program is a haven for many students, a place where there is the potential to feel valued rather than devalued, central rather than marginalized, part of a team rather than isolated. Students often feel that they are promised some measure of control in this setting, and some amount of predictability. Therefore, they feel particularly upset when tutors and groups are changed without their participation in the decisions and with little predictability.

Students feel stigmatized outside the program by their poor literacy skills. There are additional dimensions to students' struggles to manage their identities as they confront the limits to their control over the larger social world's expectations. Students keenly feel the societal pressures for independent action and individual achievement.

There are private and public situations and practices inside and outside the program. Private and public situations have to do with the extent to which students feel private or public; that is, the extent to which they feel that they are controlling the information being communicated about them to others as well as the identities of those other persons. Private situations occur when a student is alone or with well-known and trusted others, such as in their tutoring groups or with their families at home. Public situations occur when other people are involved who are not known and trusted, or when skills use is open to the scrutiny of such persons.

Private and public practices have to do with the extent to which skills must be applied to a task in ways that are socially defined and normatively judged. For example, private practices are when students perform a task idiosyncratically, personally constructing a response that reflects their lives, personalities and skills; it is personalized and judgment about adequate performance resides more in the person than in the situation. Public practices can be understood to reflect social conventions, such as correctly writing checks or marking the answer sheets on standardized tests.

We find that students are most concerned about the interaction of these two dimensions. They are worried that they may not conduct themselves appropriately -- according to social, or public, conventions -- when in a public situation. Therefore, public practices in private situations, such as sitting at home writing out checks, reduces anxiety. However, when there are persons in the home to whom the students are not comfortable revealing their literacy skills, then home becomes a

public situation. These categories are somewhat dynamic and are defined by each student.

There may be aspects of practices that are both private and public. For example, students may be in a public situation, riding the subway. They are engaging in a private practice, reading the posters in the subway cars for skill development. However, students also feel that there are socially unacceptable public reading behaviors, such as moving their lips and subvocalizing. Thus, they feel pressures to conform to their understanding of the rules of public practices in public situations, even though the task itself, reading, is private (see Figure 3).

Impacts of Program Participation

(Specific instances are intended only to be explanatory, not inclusive)

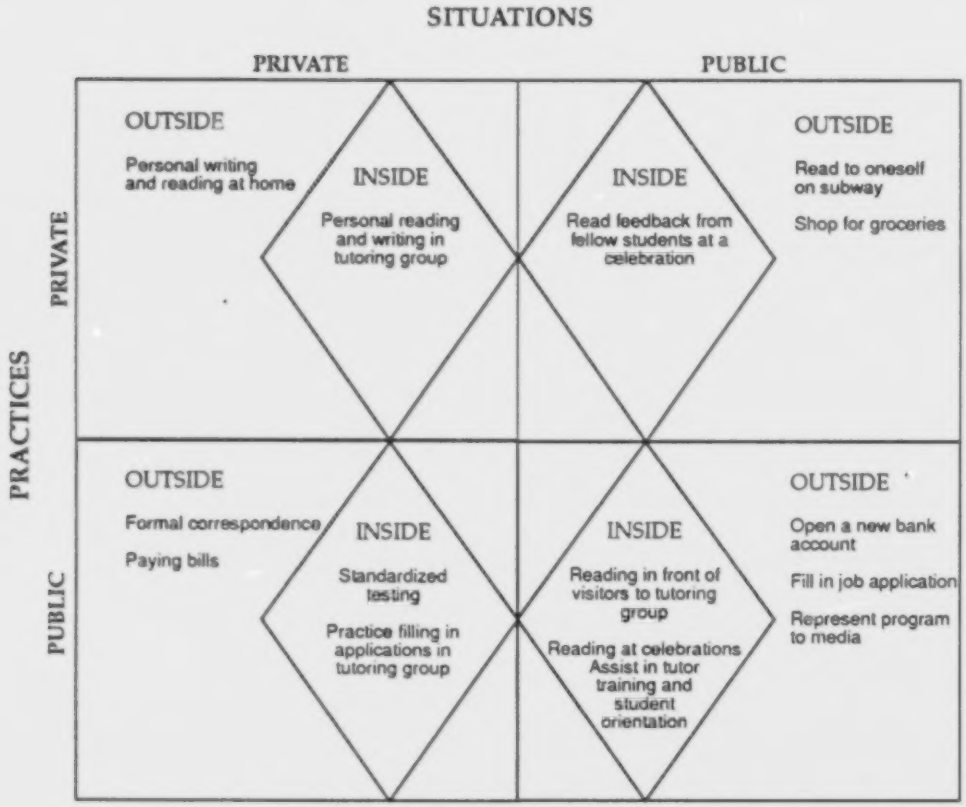

Figure 3

Reading and writing skill development

This is the arena in which students work on skill development with their tutors and other students. Many students simply talk generally about improvements in their reading and writing skills, but others offer examples of things they can do during their tutoring sessions as a result of their participation in the program. It is notable that students do not talk in school terms; they illustrate their points with reference to real reading and writing tasks rather than test scores or workbook progress. This appears to be a direct reflection of the way that LVNYC provides instruction. Many students requested longer hours and additional days for tutoring, and mentioned a desire for dependable math tutoring.

Students are used to associating literacy with private situations in which only close friends and family members see their abilities and limitations. As they develop trust in their tutors and their group, classes take on many of the characteristics of private situations. When the groups do not jell, trusting interpersonal relationships fail to become established, students continue to protect themselves, and the situation feels public even though it is inside the program. We saw many more groups that operate well than the opposite.

Students are looking for reading material that will be interesting, challenging and within reach; watching their progression through books of increasing difficulty is one gauge for reading skill development. Speed and comprehension are additional ways that students assess their skills. Standardized tests and writing are the main programmatic sources of information about student progress. Testing is a major source of stress for students. Literacy Volunteers of New York City gives students mixed messages about tests. Students know that tests are required for reports to funders and that the information is used for certain decisions, such as admission into the program and readiness for transition out. At the same time as the tests are imbued with these gatekeeper functions, the program also is trying to consistently

convey the message that reading materials and writing tasks should be relevant to students' lives and experiences. Students are taught to use their prior knowledge when reading and writing.

Literacy Volunteers of New York City addresses literacy as skills, tasks and practices, to varying degrees. Examining the relationship between skills use inside and outside the program, however, raises questions about literacy as critical reflection and social action. In other words, do students develop a perspective on the relationship between their skill development and larger social structures. Talk inside the program focuses on individual achievement or individual issues and tutors see themselves as problem solvers rather than problem posers. This encourages a notion of literacy that remains on the level of individual achievement.

Participating in program events and other activities

Literacy Volunteers of New York City involves students inside the program in a number of activities in addition to direct instruction. These include publishing student writing in Center and program newsletters; events at which students read their writing to others in their Center or in the overall program as well as their family and friends; media coverage of literacy and the program; involvement in tutor and student orientation and training; and local, state and national conferences.

Students who participate in these activities are allowing their sense of LVNYC as a safe space to support a number of new practices. Speaking to a large group (such as during a celebration) in this setting is a very different situation from speaking to other large groups. Although public, it retains the feeling of being inside, among one's friends and peers. Participation in the publishing program is extremely motivating and enhancing to students' self-concepts. It becomes problematic for a few students at the point that the products of publishing go outside; this is true of participation in media coverage as well. In general, students find participation in

celebrations supportive and exciting. It often is a reflection of the positive impact of the program that students volunteer for these semi-public events; their ability to do well is further evidence of program effectiveness.

The program's large celebration acts as a bridge between inside and outside. Carefully planned and orchestrated, it retains the supportive features of group interaction that typify inside the program. At the same time, it invites a carefully selected sample of outside, friends and kin in; new readers and new writers know that these are persons who know about their struggles with literacy. They do not have to worry about managing the information in this setting. Many students talk about this event very positively, although they also admit that these public performances can be scary and difficult.

SECTION 6: IMPACT ON LIFE OUTSIDE THE PROGRAM

Literacy Volunteers of New York City would like students to be able to use their skills outside the program, to have a positive impact on the quality of their daily lives. In this section we present a variety of situations in which students use their developing literacy skills; the situations provide opportunity for practice as well as application. Students believe that by using their skills, they continue to grow and learn. Adult learners in LVNYC describe a wide range of changes in activities and relationships that are related to literacy at home, which is usually a private situation. In public situations students use their skills to deal with daily chores such as grocery shopping, banking, and public transportation, as well as in their jobs.

Outside and private

LVNYC students believe that their progress will depend, partly, on the amount of time and energy they invest in learning. This means that they have to practice their new skills all the time -- not just when they are in tutoring sessions. Some tutors ask students to do specific homework assignments; others spend time helping

students identify existing opportunities for practice in their daily lives. The issue of reading and writing at home is more complex than simply whether or not a student has the quiet time and the energy after a long work day. It also has to do with the students' lives at home -- their social networks, the relationships they have established with their family and friends. Increasing the amount of reading and writing they do at home means that students have to renegotiate many of the relationships that are central to their lives.

The impact of new skills on private lives that was the most widespread was on public practices such as paying bills that require some initial assistance but become relatively predictable. Reading and writing for learning, however, is both not predictable and must be done on a regular basis, so it places new demands on relationships with helpers and new significance on the role reading and writing play in that relationship. These are private practices that are defined by the student more than by the demand of the task. As such, students often have more control constructing these practices, but they must place more reliance on their skills and on their helpers as well.

All students experience some change in their interpersonal relationships, depending on the extent to which they previously had assistance with tasks that they are doing independently now, or the extent to which they involve others in new tasks. Students differ at the point where they think about involving new people in supporting their skill development or application, or when they think about allowing new people to know about their literacy skills problems. This is an important point; it places relationships at the center of our thinking about how to help students move their learning from the classroom into their homes.

The relationships established in the literacy program are a source of psychological support for students; they can bring tasks from home into class since they know the program is a place they can feel accepted. Those relationships do not transfer

however; students do not develop friendships with each other on the outside and feel limited to their pre-existing social networks when not in class. The situations inside and outside the program are fundamentally different because the nature and source of the relationships in each situation are different, giving rise to different literacy practices and choices.

Outside and public: Reading the world

There are numerous ways in which students engage in literacy practices in public situations in new ways; four environments are consistently discussed by the students participating in this evaluation: jobs (which we are classifying as public because most students have little or no control over who observes them at work), banks, public transportation, and grocery stores. Students strongly assert that participation in LVNYC has had a strong positive impact on their lives in all four of these areas. In all of these situations they want to fit in. They do not want to keep the line waiting at the bank or the grocery store; they do not want to draw attention to themselves on the subway platform as they struggle to figure out which side will have the uptown train.

Many students felt held back in the past because of their literacy skills. The students who spoke with us said that they deal with the literacy demands of their jobs through familiarity and help from coworkers. Most students have jobs that require little or no literacy skills. They are concerned about their co-workers or employers learning about their poor literacy skills because they believe it will affect how they are viewed -- their social status. A few students attest to the impact their participation in Literacy Volunteers of New York City has had on their work; students' skills remain relatively low in relation to demands of higher level jobs. Most of the impact has to do with small tasks, such as reading labels or street signs, and with a new sense of competence and confidence.

A number of students assert that their skill development has had an impact on their general sense of mobility. They feel more confident to try going to new places, and their skills support reading street signs now, for example. Students are concerned about appropriate behavior when engaging in literacy practices in the public situation of using the subways. Other students would like to use train rides to read their books, but they are self-conscious when they feel their materials look childish. Entering the group of proficient subway readers is an important accomplishment for many students.

Although many students talk about being able to read bills now, they often still bring cash to pay the bill. Banks are public situations, and many students describe the traumas of the paperwork necessary to open an account and to deposit and withdraw money, as well as learning how to write out checks. They talk with pride about opening a bank account as one of the impacts of their participation in Literacy Volunteers of New York City and bank accounts figure prominently in stories about the traps that can be found in everyday places. Opening a bank account signifies movement to a new level of independence for many students. Grocery shopping is important as well; many students describe feeling able to buy new foods and to read labels without assistance; this is no small accomplishment. Students also feel better able to respond to dietary restrictions.

The situations and literacy practices students describe in this section reflect the dominant culture. Students are not only learning how to do a specific reading or writing task, they are learning how to appropriately embed that skill in a practice. Behavior that is considered appropriate in these situations varies from culture to culture. Shopping at the neighborhood store where everyone knows everyone else requires different interpersonal etiquette than does shopping at a large impersonal supermarket. Students are developing a repertoire of culturally-situated and culturally-appropriate literacy practices. Students show evidence of a traditional,

individualistic orientation to literacy skills development that reflects their understanding of the individualistic nature of American social philosophy and the situated nature of literacy practices.

Changes in beliefs and attitudes

Students' definitions of situations are informed by their feelings about themselves and about literacy. As students participate in instruction and use their skills inside and outside the program, their feelings and attitudes change; this, in turn, influences how they use their skills. Beliefs, feelings and attitudes are connected to students' cultural backgrounds, life experiences and personalities. They also are situational; students may feel comfortable about themselves or their literacy skills at some times and uncomfortable at others.

When students first enter the program, they often feel better simply because they are taking a step, confronting a problem and doing something for themselves. Although the initial sense of exhilaration sustains involvement at the beginning, students need to see progress in their skills in order to continue feeling good about themselves. As students experience some success with their studies, they talk about change in their attitudes toward reading and writing tasks, in their willingness to struggle with literacy. Many students talk about their willingness to try new books, new words, new tasks and new challenges. Many of the students we spoke with are actually enjoying reading and writing for the first time in their lives. Students' attitudes towards themselves as learners are changing; many students have taken the initiative to begin learning other new skills, using community resources as well as the program. They talk about their insight into ways that they learn best.

In spite of widespread positive changes in self-concept and attitudes among the students participating in this study, there remain great individual variation in the extent to which students actually apply their skills to engage in literacy practices in

new ways. In some cases, students do not want others to know the status of their skills, in the past or at present. At other times, students find themselves unable to do things in public situations that they were able to do in private; this is known as "performance anxiety," a state of such high anxiety that performance is impaired.

The students who participated in this evaluation study talk about shame that is deep, pervasive and persistent. Its roots run back to childhood memories of difficult schooling, family and community experiences. Although shame often is treated as an individual, psychological phenomenon, it is created as a response to some message in the social environment. That environment feels unsafe, and people talk of "hiding." Many students have some perspective on their general ability, apart from their difficulty with literacy skills. Students' shame and sense of hopelessness is the result of negative personal experiences.

Confronting deep feelings of shame requires courage on the part of the students, and this can be nurtured by environments in which adults feel safe and accepted. Students make a direct connection between participation in the program and changes in their sense of shame. Initially it has to do with coming to the Center and participating in a group with others who have similar secrets. Other students struggle with overcoming their sense of shame in the world outside the program; they consistently talk about "coming out of the closet." The sense of shame seems to begin to lift as the result of a combination of being in an environment in which it feels safe to be open as well as develop skills, so that students' relationships to the tasks themselves are changing.

Low self-esteem is a social construct, connected to adults' sense of shame and stigma. It follows that learners' attitudes and confidence will change when either: (1) the stigmatizing condition changes (i.e., they develop literacy skills); or (2) their perspective on the stigmatizing condition changes (i.e., they realize that their low literacy skills are not their "fault"). When students talk about coming out of the

closet, they are describing a profound process of renegotiating their definitions of normal and their relationship to the dominant culture. Once the deep sense of shame begins to abate, anxiety over performance will change as well, facilitating the development of new public literacy practices in public situations outside the program.

SECTION 7: THE STUDENT LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The Student Leadership Program complements the instructional program. It consists of the Student Committee, a student who attends board meetings, and former students who are student advocates on the staff of the central office, forming the Student Leadership Team. Students also participate in orienting new students, training volunteers, and media presentations about the program. LVNYC is acknowledged around the country as one of the leaders in supporting literacy student leadership development. The program presents challenges to students, tutors, and staff alike.

The context of power relationships

Students see a route to leadership roles in the program. It begins in their tutoring sessions, where they can, sometimes, take leadership roles. Then, they can be elected as one of their Center's two student representatives to the Student Committee. They also can represent the program at conferences and to the media, and they can be elected to the LVNYC board. They see that some former students are employed as Center Assistants. Finally, two former students serve as the Student Leadership Team on the staff in the central office. Although these positions appear to carry with them some amount of power and authority, students look beneath the structures to examine the real extent to which it is possible to influence the program.

We believe that the staff of Literacy Volunteers of New York City engages in the Student Leadership Program in good faith. Nonetheless, students operate in a

complex web of power and authority relationships within which they appear to remain dependent on the good faith of professional paid staff. Students bring with them their experience of power relationships outside the program, and their sense of themselves as relatively powerless and stigmatized. Although they come to feel safe inside the program in terms of allowing others to know about their skills limitations, the larger issues of empowerment that would support open expression of their feelings and experience do not seem to be addressed on any systematic basis. Power and authority seem to remain firmly in the hands of the paid staff and, secondarily, the predominantly middle-class tutors. Students maintain a culture of silence about power relationships that differs little from that on the outside.

The student committee

The Student Committee is made up of two elected representatives from each of the nine instructional programs who meet monthly. The Committee also selects candidates from their membership for election to the Board of Directors. Representatives are elected for two-year terms on a rotating basis. The Student Committee seems to have the function of conveying information between students and central office staff, as well as organizing social events such as parties and fund raisers.

Student representatives express difficulties getting students to run for election, getting students to attend meetings at their Centers, getting Center Directors and tutors to support meetings, and getting other members of the Student Committee to respond to their ideas. Decision making in the Committee has been confusing. There are no clear guidelines for what decisions come before the committee, the procedures for examining issues, or the mechanisms for making decisions that reflect the group.

Students appear to have two different concepts of leadership roles reflected in the ways they talk about the role of student representative. One group seems to view

leadership in terms of personal authority; they have an enhanced status among the students in their Centers and they seem to feel allied with the professional staff for enforcing policy and meeting the program's goals. Other students seem to view their roles as leaders more in relationship to other students; they are channels for students' voices to be heard and they want the possibility of influencing policy. Although they talk about being leaders without a clear definition, all of the students in leadership positions see it as an important responsibility.

Literacy Volunteers of New York City is not clear about what they mean by leadership and leadership development. The structures have been put in place without delineating the processes and mechanisms that provide accountability. Students' rights and the program's expectations are not declared. As a result the students are vulnerable to the structures that operate on the basis of personal relationships.

Center Directors and other staff raise serious questions about the student leadership program in general, asking if they are exploiting students, interfering with their reading and writing instruction to be involved in a host of other activities that are tangential to their main goal of developing literacy skills. The difficulty of getting students to run for election for student representative supports the questions being asked about whether students see a benefit for themselves. This benefit could be on two levels; students might identify specific skills they are learning (e.g., literacy, public speaking, or group management) or they might believe that participation in the leadership program improves the effectiveness of the instructional program, leading to enhanced skill development during instruction or enhanced use of skills outside the program. This is a policy issue for the program; the staff have to decide the extent to which they would like to see one or both of these impacts connected to participation in the leadership program.

The program appears to embody an individually-oriented approach to problem solving in which someone in authority (such as the tutor or the Center Director) is asked to solve problems for students. Students are not directed to work together with other students, organizing them, to develop approaches to common problems. In this context of individual action, group meetings have no real purpose other than information transfer. The training being provided to Student Committee members seems to reinforce the notion of leadership as discrete skills (i.e., running a meeting, dealing with conflict, etc.) which supports individual rather than group activity. Internal tensions among the members of the Student Committee seem to be viewed as personality problems. However, in this environment students have no formally guaranteed rights; they must find and cultivate relationships with sympathetic staff members, contributing to the development of factions involving students as well as staff.

Traditional concepts of leadership define the leader as the person with a vision who is able to mobilize the group to fulfill that vision. An alternative, consistent with the work of social action organizer Kahn (1970, 1982) and proposed by Heifetz and Sinder (1988), places the group rather than the leader at the center. In this view, the leader is responsible for mobilizing the group to get its work done. The work of leaders in this model is fundamentally educational; leaders must be critical learners who can question the conventional wisdom in a situation, listen to everyone's points of view, help develop new ways of thinking about the issues and of responding, and reframe the situation as it changes.

This suggests that LVNYC might involve everyone -- students, tutors and staff -- in re-examining the model of leadership that is implicit in their work. An alternative model in which leaders work with students to help students identify their common issues, fashion responses that bring together the various perspectives in the group, and accomplish work may lead to renewed energy around the program,

enhanced learning for everyone, and substantive progress toward change in areas central to students' lives.

SECTION 8. QUANTITATIVE DATA METHODS AND FINDINGS

The data for quantitative analysis included students' writing samples taken at different points in their participation in the program, and students' standardized test scores. We agreed to collect data that already were being generated in the program, since students were required to take standardized tests at 50-hour intervals and were writing on a regular basis.

Methods: Writing samples

The evaluation of the LVNYC writing curriculum consisted of an examination of students' writing samples. The writing consultant generated a rubric modeled on a variety of writing assessment tools. The items on the rubric were based upon the kinds of elements found in the students' writing samples.

An analysis was done on a total of 66 samples from 33 students (07% of the possible pool), where one of the samples came from the first month the student was in the program. This allowed us to examine the relationship between cumulative length of time in the program and change in writing scores. Average difference scores were calculated for each of three groups, divided according to length of time elapsed between the samples.

Methods: Reading test scores

LVNYC receives funding from New York City which is administered through the Community Development Agency (CDA). City policy requires that LVNYC administer the Reading (Vocabulary and Comprehension) portion of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to students who score at or above the 3.0 grade level on a reading vocabulary inventory. In addition, at the time of this evaluation

LVNYC administers the Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE) test or the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test to students who score at or below the third grade level.

Students are tested when they enter the program and, thereafter, at 50 hour intervals. Students with regular attendance at a program that meets bi-weekly for one and a half hour sessions can expect to be tested about once every six months.

The purpose of analyzing student reading test scores was to assess change in reading skills on a standardized measure over the length of time spent in the program. For the sample of 114 students, (25% of the possible pool of students) we had date of entry into the program, test score at entry into the program, total number of hours in the program at the time of testing, and most recent test scores. Grade level equivalent scores were used for all analyses. This allowed comparisons between different forms of the same test and between different tests.

Two types of statistical operations were performed on the data. A regression analysis was performed on all test scores, to correlate length of time in program with grade level achieved. We hypothesized there would be a positive relationship between the length of time in the program and increase in test scores. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) is a statistical procedure that reduces error due to differences in the subjects that are known prior to the "treatment". A third procedure produced frequency distributions of test score differences according to length of time in the program or entry level test score.

It is responsible to stress the importance of the small number of samples in both the writing task analysis (07% of the student population) and test score analysis (25% of the students) when attempting to make inferences about the program as a whole. When sample sizes are small, individual differences have a greater impact on the results, which makes generalized inferences about program effects questionable.

Standardized test score analysis: Findings

We hypothesized that the longer a student was in the program (measured by the number of hours), the higher his/her posttest scores would be and the greater the grade level gain. In our analyses we examined the (a) relationship between test scores at entry and test scores at a later date (i.e., gains), (b) relationship between the length of time in the program and the test score gains (in grade levels) between the pre and posttests, and (c) the effect of the relationship between the pretest level and a students' length of time on the test score gains (i.e., did students who started at a lower level and stayed in the program a longer time increase their scores more than students who started at a higher level and stayed in the program just as long? what about if they stayed in the program for a shorter time? etc.). In other words, we looked at whether it was possible to predict that students who came in at a particular reading level and remained in the program for a certain amount of time would make a particular amount of gain in their reading skills as measured by the test. These claims are being made for the test sample only.

For the sample of 114 students:

- Average grade level score at entry (pretest) was 1.518 (The standard deviation was 1.3 grade level, which means that the distribution of students' scores is skewed toward the lower end, with a lot difference among the scores).
- Average grade level score (posttest) was 2.4 (standard deviation: 1.3; this distribution is probably slightly less skewed, with a little less difference among the scores)
- Average grade level gain was .9 years (almost a year)
- Average length of time in the program, for the sample, was 229 hours

Although this shows a gain, it was not found to be statistically significant. This means that students made a gain, but the gain cannot be attributed to spending time in the program any more than it can be attributed to other factors. The correlation coefficients (P) were: .42 for hours and score differences and .03 for pretest scores and

score differences. The results of the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) reveal no statistically significant effects on differences in grade level gains between the pre and posttest scores based on length of time in the program, grade level at entry into the program or the relationship between the length of time in the program and entry grade level score (see Table 3). In all cases the individual differences between students were greater than differences between students grouped together according to length of time in the program or beginning reading levels.

Table 3

ANCOVA Table of Results

Source	DF	Type I SS	F Value	PR > F
Hours	1	0.00003330	0.00	0.9947
Entry Level	28	18.68669427	0.89	0.6299
Hours and Entry Level	17	9.19984579	0.72	0.7734
		Type III SS		
Hours	1	0.38739426	0.51	0.4758
Entry Level	17	10.94648268	0.85	0.6266
Hours and Entry Level	17	9.19984579	0.72	0.7734

P less than or equal to .05 is significant.

In order to understand the meaning of these findings, we generated three matrices of frequency distributions for the sample. In Table 4 we see that almost or more than half of the students in the sample entering the program at a grade level of less than 3 remained in the program longer than 2 years. This is a high retention rate for our sample compared to the program population as a whole. At higher entry grade levels the percentages of students who remain in the program more than 2

years drops sharply. The sample size in these cells is very small, however; we cannot generalize to the overall program.

Table 4

Number of Students By Time in Program and Entry Level Grade Equivalents

		Time in Program (hours)			
		0 - 60	61 - 200	201 -	Row Total
Entry level grade equivalents	Less than 1.0	10 (8.7%)	7 (6.1%)	16 (14.0%)	33 (28.9%)
	Between 1.1 and 2.9	11 (9.6%)	17 (14.9%)	34 (29.8%)	62 (54.4%)
	3.0 and higher	7 (6.1%)	8 (7.0%)	4 (3.5%)	19 (16.7%)
	Column Total	28 (24.6%)	32 (28.1%)	54 (47.4%)	114 (100.0%)

In Table 5 we see that of the 33 students in our sample who entered the program testing below the 1.0 grade level, 48% made gains between 1.1 and 2 grade levels, and 9% have made gains of greater than 2.0 grade levels. 16% of the people who entered at the 1.0 to 2.9 grade level have made 2.0 grade level gains. All 19 students who entered at the 3.0 grade level or above have made 1.0 or less grade level gains, however.

In Table 6 we see that 24.6% of the sample population have been in the program 60 hours or less. Of these 28 students, 68% made 1.0 or less grade level gains, while 14% made greater than 2.0 grade level gains. 28% of the sample have been in the program for two years. Of these 32 students, 72% made 1.0 or less grade level gains

Table 5

Number of Students By Length of Time in Program and Gain Scores in Grade Levels

		Gains in Grade Equivalent Scores			
		0 - 1	1.1 - 2.0	2.1 +	Row Total
Time in Hours	Less than 60	19 (16.6%)	5 (4.3%)	4 (3.5%)	28 (24.6%)
	Between 61 and 200	23 (20.1%)	5 (4.3%)	4 (3.5%)	32 (28.1%)
	200 and up	32 (28.0%)	17 (14.9%)	5 (4.3%)	54 (47.4%)
	Column Total	74 (64.9%)	27 (23.7%)	13 (11.4%)	114 (100.0%)

and 13% made greater than 2.0 grade level gains. 47% of the sample have been in the program greater than 2 years. Of these 54 students, 59% have made 1.0 or less grade level gains over the entry level test and 9% have made gains of greater than 2.0 grade levels.

Discussion and Conclusion. When attempting to examine the effects of participation in the program on changes in students' test scores, we controlled statistically for entry level skills. It is desirable, as part of the statistical operation, to demonstrate a strong linear relationship between the entry level skills and change in test scores (Keppel, 1982). For example, with a strong linear relationship, if we were to arrange the students in order of entry level test scores from lowest to highest, this arrangement would remain relatively stable with the posttest scores. Measuring this relationship permits pre-existing subject differences to be considered when trying to

Table 6

Number of Students By Entry Grade Level and Gain Scores in Grade Levels

		Gains in Grade Equivalent Scores			
		0 -1	1.1 - 2.0	2.1 +	Row Total
Grade equivalent at time of entry	Less than 1	14 (12.2%)	16 (14.0%)	3 (2.6%)	33 (28.9%)
	Between 1.1 and 2.9	41 (35.9%)	11 (9.6%)	10 (8.7%)	62 (54.4%)
	3.0 and higher	19 (16.6%)			19 (16.7%)
	Column Total	74 (64.9%)	27 (23.7%)	13 (11.4%)	114 (100.0%)

determine program effects. We found a nonexistent relationship (r = .03), which means that differences between students' skills before they entered the program did not predict their subsequent performance on tests. There was a weak relationship between the length of time in the program and positive changes in test scores over time (r=.42); this means that about 18% of the change in scores can be attributed to length of time in the program, while 82% of the change remains unexplained. Therefore, on the basis of this analysis, we cannot state that changes in test scores are any more related to participation in the program than they are to chance differences between students.

Descriptive information of how many students made gains relative to entry level scores and length of time in the program also does not seem to reveal any consistent pattern. While there are indications that students continue to make slight gains in

test scores, no clear predictable patterns emerge that permit inferences about program impacts on students as measured by these tests.

Integrating quantitative and qualitative data to strengthen the assessment of program impacts only works when qualitative and quantitative methods are measuring the same thing (Patton,1980). We need to define as precisely as possible what is being measured by each method. For example, to say that changes in reading skills are represented by changes in reading test scores assumes that the tests are measuring literacy skills that are being taught in the program. Students describe the tests as being unrelated to their experience in the program and unrelated to their knowledge about literacy. This means that the validity of the measure is questionable.

We find increases in test scores, but they vary from person to person in a way that defies finding a simple pattern, statistically, and we cannot claim that we know, from the test score data, what substantially influences those increases. This finding is consistent with the small amount of research literature in adult education that examines this issue. For example, in Jackson's study of community-based literacy programs for the Association for Community Based Education, he finds, "The only finding that bears remembering is that self-esteem helps learners in the acquisition of skills and self-determination" (ACBE, 1989, p. 100). Alamprese (1990), after reviewing the literature on standardized test score research, says that, "It is not clear what these gains represent in terms of learner's skills or overall effects of programs" (p. 112).

Most research that talks about grade level gains per hour of instruction does not describe or identify the relationship between what is being addressed in instruction and what is being tested (see ACBE, 1989, for example). When computing gains per 100 hours, researchers tend to project, assuming a linear relationship. Thus, if students have been in the program for 20 hours and gained .3 grade level

equivalents, the researcher might present this conclusion as 1.5 grade level gain per 100 hours. Our data from LVNYC, however, show that there is not necessarily a linear relationship, and the figures presented in other studies purporting to show gain over time are highly suspect. In addition, researchers contend that studies have shown a very low correlation between hours of attendance and mean reading gains (ACBE, 1989; Sticht, 1990).

Sticht (1990) supports our students' assertions that their scores may not change (or that gains may actually be negative) because they are approaching the test differently as they develop their skills:

> It is possible... that negative gain may occur because learners on the pre-test do not work at any given item too long, because they think they cannot perform the test task, and so they simply guess at all the items. On the post-test they spend more time on each item because they have new competence and think they should not guess but try to actually comprehend and perform each item. This could lead to more accurate, but fewer test items being completed at the post-test, and hence a negative gain score. (p. 21)

And we cannot discount the potential effect of the difference between LVNYC's approach to instruction and the assumptions inherent in the tests. Lytle and Wolfe (1989) explain:

> There is often a wide gulf between the instruction provided in a program and what is assessed in a standardized test... Sometimes it is a struggle for learners to see the relationship between a multifaceted curriculum and progress as determined by a standardized test.... Still further, the format of standardized tests as collections of passages with questions that have single right answers demonstrates a view of reading that denies the possibility of multiple readings of texts or of texts read for a variety of purposes. (p. 45)

This is particularly important in a program such as LVNYC in which the emphasis is on "real-world" use of skills. As Sternberg (1990) asserts, "IQ tests, achievement tests, and academic problems tend to be well-structured. There is a path, and if you follow that path, you're guaranteed a solution.... Despite the fact that test problems and most academic problems are well-defined, very few real-world problems are defined" (p. 37).

Farr and Carey (1986), writing on reading measurement for the International Reading Association, further assert that,

> One of the major problems with the multiple choice format is the insistence on a single correct answer. Recent research has emphasized that reading comprehension is a constructive process and that meaning is as dependent on the reader as it is on the test. Thus, the single correct answer format provides a dilemma for authors of multiple choice tests. Even if a particular answer is agreed upon by a committee of experts, the possibility exists that a creative reader is capable of going beyond conventional implications of the passage to infer a response that is incorrect when measured against the single response anticipated and allowed. (p. 34)

All of these researchers and authors serve to remind us that the test score data should be interpreted with great caution, and should be only one of a multitude of indicators taken into account when assessing the extent to which students are learning.

Writing samples

Kazemek (1985) argues that adults need long exposure to instruction to become really proficient writers. According to this argument, students should make improvements in their writing throughout their instructional experience. We would expect to see gains in writing scores with time spent in the program.

We computed average difference scores for the first analysis of 48 paired writing samples. The results are displayed in Table 7. Average difference scores are calculated by subtracting the score on the first writing sample from the score on the second one for each individual in each group. Then these individual differences are averaged within each group.

The overall mean difference score for the 48 students was 7.38 points which indicates that students make gains in writing related to length of time in the program. However, it was not clear what these differences represented because we needed to examine students' skills levels at the time of entry.

Table 7

Mean Difference Scores by Time and Program

Time in Program	Mean Difference Scores
4 - 6 months	8.29 points
7 - 12 months	7.27 points
More than 12 months	6.57 points

Therefore, a second analysis was done on a subset of 33 paired writing samples, one of which was done at the beginning of participation in the program. The mean length of time in the program for group one was 5.38 months; group two, 9.42 months; and group three, 16.67 months. Difference score averages for each group were 9.23, 6.75, and 7.5 respectively. (See Table 8).

The results of both analyses suggest that rapid gains in writing scores are seen in the initial stages of instruction, but it is less clear what happens after that. One concern is that when such a small sample is used, individual differences have a greater influence on group means than if there are greater numbers of students. It is necessary to look at patterns among the subtests in the writing of these groups of students for a clearer picture of the development of writing skills.

Beginning students can be expected to use little, if any, punctuation at first, giving rise to long sentences. As they become more practiced, students can be expected to divide their writing into short sentences. Later, as students learn to write compound and complex sentences, the length of sentences increases. We used the number of sentences and the number of words per sentence as a measure of syntactic control and found differences in the expected directions. Students in the beginning group

Table 8

Mean Difference Scores on Writing Samples
Listed by Sub-areas of the Rubric Scoring Sheet

Student Grouped By Interval Between Samples	Average months in program	Number of words	Number of sentences	Number of words per sentence	Content/ Organization	Vocabulary	Sentence and Paragraph Structure	Mechanics	Total
0-6 months (13)	5.38	35.23	2.46	-.46	4.92	2.46	.69	1.15	9.23
7-12 months (12)	9.42	73.66	6.83	-17.08	3.5	1.5	1.17	.92	6.75
13+ months (8)	16.67	44.13	2.75	11	3.0	1.75	1.0	1.13	7.5

wrote fewer sentences with fewer words, while the 7 to 12 month group wrote more sentences with few words. The more than 12 month group wrote fewer, but lengthier sentences, suggesting more complex sentence structure and use of punctuation.

Students are making rapid gains in writing competence during the first months of their literacy class experience. Differences in rate of change for students over time may relate to changes in content to less personal topics and increased emphasis on mechanics during editing. Differences may also be a phenomenon of this particular sample of students and not representative of the program as a whole.

Conclusion

Almost all of the students we spoke with believe that they are developing their literacy skills through their participation in Literacy Volunteers of New York City, although the rate of skill development varies. Their assessment is supported strongly by the results of the writing samples, and is supported in a weaker fashion by the results of analyzing the standardized test scores. Skill development in the abstract is not the goal of either LVNYC as a program, or of the students, however; they are interested in how they can use their skills in their lives outside the program. Information about individual student performance inside the program is only the beginning of trying to understand the broader pattern of program impact.

SECTION 9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Literacy Volunteers of New York City's instructional program is a dynamic response to the needs and interests of adults with very low literacy skills. Students work together in groups with one or two tutors, helping each other learn to read and write as they slowly peel off layers of negative feelings about themselves and their potential. Many of the problems experienced by the program relate to ways in which it is experimenting with new practices in the United States and attempting to develop a model of instruction that is consistent with current research and theory; there are few models of good student-centered literacy education in the United States to which it can turn for assistance.

CONCLUSIONS

Students' literacy skills development

Students are developing literacy skills through their participation in LVNYC. They discuss numerous ways in which their literacy practices are changing as a result of their new abilities. The range of indicators of skill development that inform this

conclusion include students' testimony, the perspectives of members of some students' inner social networks (parents, siblings, children, friends), judgments of tutors and Center Directors, standardized test score data, and writing samples over time. In addition to improvement in skill levels, we also see movement from a text-based to a knowledge-based view of reading and writing. This appears to be directly connected to LVNYC's approach to reading and writing instruction.

Self-concept, attitudes and beliefs

Students experience change in attitudes and beliefs in a number of areas. They see literate persons in a more realistic light; their willingness to take risks with new literacy tasks is increased; their enjoyment of literacy is greatly enhanced; and their attitudes about literacy, teaching and learning have become more oriented to the role of prior knowledge and experience. Students' attitudes and beliefs remain oriented to fitting in to the mainstream society and to individual social mobility.

As students' skills develop through their participation in LVNYC, their image of themselves moves closer to their ideal and their self-esteem increases. In addition, the program fosters development of students' self-esteem in other areas (e.g., their ability to learn, in general; their ability to relate well to others, including college-educated volunteers and staff members; their ability to help others, as seen in their interaction in their groups; their ability to write pieces that others find worthy of publishing, etc.). As a result, the negative feelings students have about their specific skills may have a smaller impact on their general self-esteem.

Students receive mixed messages about their roles and authority. Literacy Volunteers of New York City does not appear to have clarity about what is meant by leadership or leadership development. The structures are in place without the processes and mechanisms to support them; the Student Committee exists, for example, but the range of its functions and the rules for its operation are not defined.

As a result, students receive mixed messages about their rights, authority, and power which can lead to a variety of problems. It interferes with creating the kind of safe, predictable and responsive situation in which students can transform their terror and shame.

Impact on life outside

There are extensive changes in students' participation in literacy practices in their lives outside the program; since practices are social, these shifts imply changes in relationships as well as new tasks being accomplished. Inside the program we see skill changes and the willingness to be open and ask for and receive assistance in the tutoring groups. Outside the program, many students speak with pride of their accomplishments as newly independent readers and writers at home. There are extensive changes in their relationships with those who have been their helpers.

All of the students with whom we spoke describe some changes; the movement stops or is severely slowed at the point that the situation changes from being inside the program to outside the program, or from private to public. For example, students may feel comfortable using new skills and learning when they are in their tutoring groups. When a visitor comes to the group, it is transformed, for some students, from a private to a public situation. Stress and fear increase, interfering with these students' learning and performance. Similarly, students may confidently fill out application forms in class but have terrible difficulty when facing a prospective employer; the situation moves from inside to outside which changes the practice even through the specific task (filling in the application) remains constant.

When students do not use their skills, or do not feel that they have access to their skills (i.e., performance anxiety), this reflects the power of shame. Students remain terrified of the negative judgment of others. Even when students discuss important and concrete positive changes in their skills, their self-concept, their self-esteem, and

their practices, they regularly accompany that by saying that they still have not told many of their friends, family members, employers and coworkers about their skills limitations and their participation in school.

The biggest challenge for many students appears to be getting beyond the barriers of shame that undermine developing new interpersonal relationships and more fully integrating skills into practices. This may be facilitated by incorporating into instruction more of an emphasis on literacy as critical reflection; this will help students transform their self-blame as they develop an appreciation of the social factors that contributed to their literacy problems as well as to the stigma attached to illiteracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our general recommendation is that Literacy Volunteers of New York City develop a process through which the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this report can be shared with members of all of the groups that have a stake in the program, including the students, staff, tutors, and board members. Then these groups must be involved in creating their response, working together within the parameters set by the board and staff. The issues raised in this report are consistent with the issues that the staff has been discussing; this was affirmed by the Executive Director and the Education Director when they reviewed an earlier draft of this report.

The provision of services

The findings and conclusions from this evaluation study support the ways that Literacy Volunteers of New York City organizes and provides services; students are learning in ways that are consistent with their goals. At the same time, however, a number of issues emerged from this study that suggest that the program may want to explore some changes in this area.

1. Tutor training. Students consistently mention the negative effects of tutor turnover; efforts should be made to **1) develop an understanding of why tutors leave; 2) establish systems for tutor support that will decrease attrition and enhance the effectiveness of instruction; 3) help students deal with tutor turnover.** Students experience problems when their tutors change because they are wrenched from a relationship that has become important in their lives. They describe the dual problems of feeling out of control as well as taking the chance of getting a new tutor who is inexperienced and, perhaps, less effective. Students will benefit from increased predictability which could come from decreasing tutor attrition as well as **developing a program policy addressing students' rights in relation to tutor changes that are imposed by Center Directors.**

Tutors need ongoing, systematic assistance. Once they move into their tutoring assignments, that assistance should be based in their Centers. **We recommend that Literacy Volunteers of New York City develops a system for regular in-service staff development** that will support tutors' skill development and, we hope, reinforce their commitment and their staying power as well.

2. Termination of Instruction. Students in the Transition Group and those who have graduated from the program consistently talk about having difficulty finding new programs that they enjoy and find effective. Given the research on levels of literacy development, we recommend that LVNYC **re-examine the decision to terminate instruction at a point when students are in transition from a text-based to a knowledge-based model of reading.** In the language presently used in the program, this translates into exploring moving from a limit of fifth grade level reading ability to seventh or eighth.

3. Cultural Diversity. Analysis of the impact of the extreme differences between the cultural and demographic characteristics of the students, tutors and staff of Literacy Volunteers of New York City was outside the scope of this study. However, the gap is so pronounced that we recommend that **aggressive steps be taken to increase the cultural diversity of staff and volunteers.** This means initiating a process that includes students, staff, volunteers, board members and representatives of the communities from which greater representation is sought. Engaging in this process openly and genuinely is an important step towards responding to this recommendation. In addition, we recommend that **education in cross-cultural communication be included as part of tutor training** as soon as possible, and that tutors be provided with assistance about how to recognize, understand and provide leadership for dealing with issues of race, culture, gender, dialect, and class differences that arise in their tutoring groups and in the larger program.

4. Counseling. Students experience a distinct break between their ability to engage in literacy practices inside and outside of the program. There are some things that the program does to help minimize the separation. For example, students can bring tasks from the outside into their tutoring groups for help, and they can invite persons from the outside to events such as the yearly Celebration. Using real-world materials such as application forms for instructional materials helps as well. But the difference between tasks and practices has to do with the social context. Sitting at a table in a corporate cafeteria filling in applications with assistance from one's peers is not the same as standing at a counter in an impersonal personnel office, struggling with an application under the scrutiny of a watchful clerk.

Students anxiety can be alleviated somewhat if they overpractice some skills in class, so that they become more internalized and automatic. They also can be taught simple relaxation exercises and constructive ways of responding to negative self-talk.

Students' can be encouraged to discharge their shame and terror, allowing more positive emotions to develop. Students also are dealing with a wide variety of difficult problems in their lives; some students come to the program as part of a larger process of change while others are taking their first tentative steps into new possibilities. A number of students with whom we spoke talked about the positive impact counseling has had on their lives in the last few years. Atkin, Day, Shore & Simon (1990) provide a persuasive argument for the role of counseling in conjunction with instruction to help students transform their feelings of self-blame and deal with other issues in their lives. **We recommend that Literacy Volunteers of New York City develop a plan for providing counseling services to students in a variety of formats.**

5. Moving from Inside to Outside. In addition, we recommend that LVNYC staff and tutors work with students to **develop ways that the program can support students' use of their skills in situations that are increasingly public and outside the program.** This may entail bringing relationships from inside the program to outside. For example, it might help if students plan to go together to places such as personnel offices, motor vehicles offices, banks or grocery stores. Students may be able to identify a number of situations in which they would find it helpful and supportive -- reducing anxiety -- if they were accompanied by classmates. Students also may be able to help tutors better reproduce some of the peripheral features of practices that are anxiety-producing on the outside, such as time limits and noise.

The organization of services

Many students talk about feeling that they have no control over changes in groups and tutors and certainly not over policy. Student representation appears to function primarily to carry information. We recommend that LVNYC **explore ways**

of minimizing the unpredictability of group change and involving students more centrally in decisions about instructional groups and tutor assignments.

Literacy Volunteers of New York City is committed to leadership development, but must **involve the students, staff, tutors and board in deciding what is a legitimate role for students and planning to act on that decision.** This implies that the staff must decide which policies and practices are fixed and which are open to change. Then they should develop a statement about the processes and mechanisms of accountability for changing those things.

Clarification of students' roles and support for their performance should be part of a larger staff development program. Job descriptions should be developed or clarified for the entire staff, including the students on staff, so that it is clear whether the comments made about former students' performance as staff members reflect classism and racism or portray real inadequacies in their performance. Training should be designed and provided that assists all staff members to enhance their performance in relation to their job descriptions. In addition, leadership development has to be integrated throughout the organization, rather than being viewed as an activity or service provided to one particular group of persons.

Literacy Volunteers of New York City should engage members of the stakeholders' communities in developing a student handbook that includes explanations of students' rights and processes for exercising those rights. It should emphasize the importance of putting questions or problems in writing and working through formal mechanisms.

<u>Ongoing assessment, evaluation and program development</u>

1. A process should be developed to involve all stakeholder groups in designing an evaluation and assessment procedure.

2. Center, personal and central records should be developed. Center records will be based primarily on an alternative assessment model using portfolios.

3. A new reading test should be developed that reflects the program's philosophy and students' skills and backgrounds; it should be combined with the questionnaire presently being developed and administered through a process that involves the tutor, even if the Center Director actually works with the student in the test situation.

4. A yearly narrative report should be developed that includes aggregate information from the measures as well as qualitative assessments of progress. It will be developed as part of a program-wide process of evaluation and reflection annually, including Center meetings with tutors, students and the Center Director.

The need for assessment and record keeping must be better understood, confronted, and resolved before any change will be successfully implemented. These recommendations suggest a clear commitment on the part of staff and tutors to engage in systematic data collection and record keeping. Development of an assessment process in which the Center Director plays a central role means that it may be necessary to revise the job description, qualifications and training of Center Directors. Adoption of some form of the process outlined here also implies that the program-level data manager, currently a part-time position, might be upgraded to full-time to provide the leadership this process will require.

CONCLUSION

We hope that this report conveys the excitement and commitment of all of the students, staff, volunteers and board members of Literacy Volunteers of New York City who participated in this project. We asked what is the impact for students who participate in LVNYC? The students tell us in this report that the impact is profound, touching every aspect of their lives.

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